

“A goal for my work is to honor our family’s legacy while finding my own voice in clay. By magnifying the scale of a traditional shape I am challenged to design the form based on the space it will consume and the relationship to its environment.”



BEN OWEN III
BEN OWN POTTERY
SEAGROVE

Born into the nation’s oldest continuously-operating pottery tradition in Seagrove, Owen trained with his grandfather and father, was strongly influenced by Oriental designs, and received a BFA from East Carolina University. A cultural exchange program in Japan cemented his affection for Asian cultures, and these influences, along with his distinctive red glazes, remain an integral part of his pottery. Arising from humble, utilitarian traditions, his fine art pieces have since been commissioned as gifts for luminaries like Ronald Reagan, Elizabeth Taylor and Bob Hope. He has created University of North Carolina Lifetime Achievement Awards presented to recipients including James Taylor and the North Carolina Symphony. His recent commissions have included numerous large scale wood fired vases for The Umstead Hotel in Cary, the Ritz Carlton in Tokyo, Japan and an upcoming commission for the lobby of the Ritz Carlton in New York.

Jugtown Pottery c. 1970s, Seagrove
Photo: Sam Sweezy



Seagrove in the central Piedmont was home to immigrant potters attracted by the region’s abundant clay deposits. Because of their remote location and the jugs needed by the local whisky distilling industry, Seagrove potters were able to survive a few decades longer than those potters displaced by factory-produced ceramics. In the early twentieth century, Raleigh artists Jacques and Juliana Busbee used their marketing skills and appreciation of local craftsmanship to promote the Seagrove area work. Collectors embraced pottery as not only functional but decorative, inspiring potters to utilize new materials and new firing methods to further develop their work. By the late 1920s, Seagrove area pottery was well known from the galleries of New York to the garden shops of Florida.

After World War II, Seagrove potters began high volume production of small pieces for the wholesale gift market. An individual potter might produce more than 500 pieces each day, all the in the same shape. The development of ceramic programs by nearby community colleges led to the training of many area residents in the craft. Studio artists and academically trained potters seeking a “back to the land” lifestyle began to settle in the area. Today Seagrove is home to more than 100 potters who offer a full spectrum of pottery and ceramic art.

The Arts Industry in North Carolina

“Arts and culture provide a direct connection to North Carolina’s economic stability. The state’s strong infrastructure of arts and education are important quality of life issues that make us competitive in the global marketplace.”

—ANN GOODNIGHT, A PRINCIPAL OF THE UMSTEAD HOTEL & SPA IN CARY, WHICH FEATURES A COLLECTION OF MORE THAN 80 WORKS OF ART, MOSTLY BY NORTH CAROLINA ARTISTS

Arts organizations have long made the case for economic relevance, and now creative strategies to address globalization are gaining attention from economists, business schools, and state governments. Richard Florida’s book *The Rise of the Creative Class* drew popular attention to a new definition of the workers in the knowledge economy, but similar ideas had been percolating for at least a decade both in the United States —particularly New England—and Europe, where arts have always been more central to economic development.

Creative enterprises in North Carolina are, collectively, big business. North Carolina’s core creative enterprise cluster employs more people than any of the biotechnology, computers and electronics, machinery, or transportation equipment manufacturing industries.

ARTS INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT SECTORS

Examples of Creative Enterprise Industries		
PRINCIPLE	CORE CLUSTER	FULL CLUSTER
CREATION	Graphic Design Services Independent Artists, Writers, and Performers Musical Groups and Artists Advertising Agencies	Artisanal Beverages
PRODUCTION	Jewelry (except Costume) Manufacturing Record Production Dance Companies Book Publishers	Custom Architectural Woodwork Commercial Lithographic Printing
DISSEMINATION	Art Dealers Motion Picture and Video Distribution	Libraries and Archives
INPUTS	Musical Instrument Manufacturing	Photographic Film, Paper, Plate, and Chemical Manufacturing
SUPPORT	Fine Arts Schools	Museums

Source: 2006 ES-202 data gathered by the North Carolina Employment Security Commission and 2004 Census non-employer data. The complete list of industries included in the creative cluster comprises 76 industries. See Appendix for NAICS codes of industries.